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AUTHOR	Bernhardt, Elizabeth B.
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ABSTRACT

This chapter discusses the dilemma of trying to provide professional development opportunities to teaching staff members who populate radically different conceptual spaces vis-a-vis language teaching. One portion of the teaching staff may have been teaching for 25 years and may not have any knowledge of second language acquisition and research findings derived from it, while a younger group of teaching staff may have very different expectations about how to approach teaching and learning. These two conceptual spaces set the stage for a potentially explosive and divisive teaching staff configuration. (Contains 30 references.) (Author/VWL)

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The Professional Development of Highly Experienced and Less Experienced Teachers: Meeting Diverse Needs

Elizabeth B. Bernhardt
Stanford University

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Economists often use the term "opportunity cost." An opportunity cost refers to any situation or circumstance considered to be "positive" that always brings with it a cost—a downside, an unexpected "unhappy" result, a negative, a "bill." The massive new knowledge that research in applied linguistics and fields related to foreign language education has offered in the past twenty years has provided a great **opportunity** for re-thinking curricula, for providing workplaces that are creative and exciting, and for generating an enhanced self-esteem among practitioners through increased decision-making capacities. One **cost** of this great opportunity, however, is often the professional self-esteem of teaching staff members who did not participate in or even perhaps witness the second language acquisition research revolution; who were not trained to believe that they are personally empowered to effect educational change; and who were socialized into an extremely hierarchical workplace where "experience" counted the most.

This paper discusses the dilemma of trying to provide professional development opportunities to teaching staff members who populate radically different conceptual spaces vis-à-vis language teaching. One portion of a teaching staff may have been in the trenches for 25 years and may not have any formal knowledge of second language acquisition (SLA) and research findings derived from it, while a younger portion of a teaching staff may have very different expectations about how to approach teaching and learning. These two conceptual spaces set the stage for a potentially explosive and divisive teaching staff configuration. Indeed, these spaces exist in virtually all instructional settings; both small college programs with tenure-line staff that bring in new assistant professors, as well as large programs that rely on non-tenure

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track teaching staff and graduate student teachers are not immune to these issues. It is, of course, very old news to discuss generational conflict or to decry hierarchies. Transitions from older to younger staff—no matter where (in an educational setting or in the local WalMart)—are simply a part of human nature. And hierarchies, too, seem to be normal human structures: the older one is, the more experienced in a system, the more "power"—real or imagined. The purpose of this essay is not to rehearse issues that are normal within a system, but to highlight the uniqueness of the present situation; to caution how potentially destructive "the opportunity" provided by SLA-influenced teacher development really might be; and to suggest some strategies to ameliorate unnecessary, but perhaps inevitable, tensions within teaching staffs.

Two Distinctive Historical Settings: 1970–1980; 1985–1999

A highly experienced teaching staff in the year 2000 (meaning people who have spent most of 25–30 years in full-time teaching) received most of its professional training around 1970. In the early seventies professional training generally consisted of a "methods course" which had a "methods book" that encapsulated knowledge about the four skills. In fact, in an important review of teaching conducted under the auspices of the President's Commission on Languages and International Study (1979), Benseler and Schulz (1979) carefully catalogue the methods texts used at the time: Allen and Valette, *Classroom Techniques: Foreign Languages and English as a Second Language* (1977); Chastain, *Developing Second-Language Skills: Theory to Practice* (1976); Grittner, *Teaching Foreign Languages* (1977); Rivers, *A Practical Guide to the Teaching of French* (1975) (which also included companion volumes on German, Spanish, and Russian); and Papalia, *Learner-Centered Language Teaching: Methods and Materials* (1976). These books still sit on the shelves of many of the fortysomething and fiftysomething generations of language teachers. The books themselves are relatively thorough and exhaustive lists of techniques: they are practice-oriented and were often referred to as "cookbooks," hierarchized according to grammar teaching (always first and foremost); the sound system; and then general techniques attached to "skills" such as listening comprehension and reading. To be fair, Chastain and Rivers do more than list techniques. They include conceptual and theoretical frameworks based in cognitive psychology; those frameworks are, principally, however, interpretations for second language contexts rather than documentation generated within second language settings and populations.

Contemporary discourse of the time also referenced method as meaning audiolingual, cognitive, direct, and grammar/translation as well as some "left-of-center" approaches such as The Silent Way and Suggestopedia. These methods are relics of a different kind of conceptualization of the act of foreign language teaching—that it could somehow be captured and packaged. There were ways to drill; ways of presenting vocabulary; ways of interacting with students (Moskowitz 1976); ways of using the overhead projector and audiotape recordings that would bring about student achievement. The task of the teacher-in-training was to ingest the information from the methods book and to practice the techniques in mini-lessons in methods courses. The teacher-in-training then participated in student teaching and learned from a person in the trenches the extent to which the methods in the methods book worked or not. Assessment consisted of achievement tests—scores on grammar and vocabulary tests that were rarely integrative in nature.

By the early 1980s, this model of teacher education was quickly becoming incompatible with societal forces as well as research forces. The notion of language for a purposive use (not just as mental exercise) entered the general public arena. The public outcry for relevance and usefulness in the educational experience was clear. Not only was this brought about by calls from government and business (with the rhetoric of national need, Cold War, and concerns about global business competition illustrated by the President's Commission Report of 1979), but also by observations of the growing English as a Second Language (ESL) industry that had no time or resources to offer immigrants traditional grammatically-sequenced learning. The ESL subfield of language teaching was focused on functionality—immediate needs such as health care and food—not on the present perfect subjunctive. Many people who had never been "trained" in the concept of method, and in fact, had never been trained as language teachers were entering the workplace. Language teaching—English language teaching—was seen as a social service. A number of books and articles in the 1990s address these dilemmas (Bernhardt 1998; Scarcella 1990; Tollefson 1995).

Further, an explosion of research in second language learning asserted itself, bringing with it a need for knowledgeable teacher consumers and for new academic sub-areas related to language teaching, such as second language reading and writing. This explosion radically changed the character of teacher education. Second language development, rooted in research in child language acquisition, became a key concept. Learners, just as children, did not have a Latinate-grammatical sequence in their heads. They did not learn one form and then

move to the next form; rather, forms such as prepositions were learned over a period of time and in a particular sequence—not in Chapter 6. It was no longer necessarily the case that the past tense could only be learned *after* the present. Research findings brought about the questioning of an array of assumptions about linguistic versus psycholinguistic simplicity and about which forms learners find easily learnable versus understandable (Ellis 1994; Pienemann 1984; VanPatten 1998). Comprehension research, too, led to very different perspectives on whether students should or even must be presented with linguistically simplified materials. First-language literate students could understand much more than they could produce, leading to the conclusion that there was little need to restructure or to rewrite materials for learners (Bernhardt 1991; Lee and Musumeci 1988). These and other inconsistencies between research and practice emerged as significant concerns by the late 1980s. Most of the findings were clearly at odds with the sequencing of grammatical forms in traditional language textbooks and classrooms.

Research in teacher education and calls for educational reform also current in the 1980s spawned diverse views on different models of professional preparation. Because learning was perceived as a developmental, constructive process, teacher learning also followed suit (Schulman 1986). Research that was common in the 1960s and 1970s—process product research—that statistically correlated teacher actions with student achievement became de rigueur (Wittrock 1986) and teacher conceptualization of the learning process coupled with the knowledge of individual student involvement led to different versions of how teachers are perceived and how they approach their work. Teacher decision making underlined an acceptance of research-based principles, a recognition of the sociology of classrooms and their complexities, and cognitive activity and engagement on the part of teachers—not as professionals who follow recipes, but as learners who co-construct learning and the learning environment with fellow learners, namely, students (Clark and Peterson 1986). The ethic became one in which teachers are viewed as life-long learners who are able to monitor and reflect on their own experiences and to analyze their own professional trajectory (Richards and Lockhart 1994), who value learning as a process of growth and understanding (Clark and Peterson 1986), and who are flexible in their thinking and open to alternative structures and modalities (Allwright and Bailey 1991; Chaudron 1988). Further, the literature on inservice development clarified that experienced teachers need to have different sorts of professional development experiences from their less experienced counterparts. They need to have greater input into these experiences (i.e., they need

to plan them and for the most part choose them) and their professional development opportunities need to be conducted by people perceived as peers with equivalent experience (Evans 1987; Kyle and Sedotti 1987).

The academic field of language teaching changed substantially, too. In the 1970s and 1980s second language academics conducted pedagogical workshops that were "hands on" and "how-to," driven by a sense of activity that keeps instruction moving forward. By the late '80s workshops became more conceptually oriented, focused on a research or theory-based concept with theoretically consistent activities attached. This development is, in part, due to the identification of the field of applied linguistics, consisting of a conflation of academic areas such as linguistics, sociology, and language education. Not only was a dialogue generated between these academic fields and "practice," but that dialogue also facilitated the development of subfields such as investigations into oral and written discourse, investigations and understandings of registers, the relationship between first and second language literacy in both reading and writing, and cross-language analyses of the development of grammatical forms. All of these areas came to be seen as forming the tapestry of the academic field of language teaching—one which indeed consists of individual pieces that form a highly complex and varied whole, not the traditional monolithic image of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (plus culture). Indeed, a particular consequence of this diversity was the unraveling of the traditional and almost exclusive goal of language study, literature study. By the end of the century, literature study was perceived as only *one* avenue within a diverse array of uses for language learning—not as the key purpose of advanced language study (Bernhardt 1995; Byrnes 1995; Kramsch 1995).

A final critical force pressuring new modes of teacher conceptualization and a reorientation toward teaching method was the concept of "proficiency." As researchers and teachers made a break with the tradition of seat-time and shifted toward the notion of performance, they came to confront the focus on desired student output/performance in the target language and what teachers needed to do to achieve desired student performance. Rather than "method," the concept of "Teaching for Proficiency" became the characteristic mantra of the period and its full spirit was embodied in Omaggio Hadley's *Teaching Language in Context* (1993). The book itself was structured according to the Foreign Service Institute model of assessing oral proficiency on a five-point scale. Professional inservice training opportunities were overwhelmingly focused on training teachers to learn to use the Foreign Service Institute scale and to become certified

raters of oral proficiency. Significant resources were devoted toward the training of a cadre of educators who could assess the language level of students according to a scale not specific to a particular curriculum, namely the FSI/ACTFL scale (Bernhardt 1998; Hancock and Scebold 2000).

Two Distinct Practical Positions: The 1990s

Training versus development, experience versus collaboration, longevity in the workplace versus an elaborate professional preparation, experience-based wisdom versus research-based knowledge: these various forces inserted themselves into the professional arena by the end of the 1980s. The question to be addressed in the next portion of this paper is thus *What might happen and does happen when these forces collide?*

Historically, the professional development of teachers was a relatively individual and solitary endeavor. Kyle and Sedotti note:

> Traditionally, once teachers entered professional life, their continuing education was not only difficult to trace but, like teaching itself, professional development assumed a largely private and independent nature . . . Teachers' decisions to continue their professional education emanated largely from specific personal and professional circumstances (1987, p. 101).

They continue:

> TEACHERS NEED HELP! Teachers do not, however, need help due to a lack of skill, motivation, or commitment. Rather, teachers need help in order to keep pace with a society that is undergoing rapid social, political, and economic changes that are impacting the process of schooling. Teachers are cognizant of the fact that our scientific and technological information base is expanding at an astonishing rate . . . (p. 103).

The question for the latter half of this paper is *But what if part of the teaching staff really doesn't believe Kyle and Sedotti's assertion?* In other words, what if their response to the whole concept of teaching staff development is one or a combination of the following? *"But I've been teaching effectively for more than 25 years . . ." "But I've been here for 25 years . . ." "But I only have 5 years to retirement . . ."*

"But I've been teaching effectively for more than 25 years . . ." There is no denying that teachers have always been in classrooms and that many of their students have come away from the instructional experience quite satisfied. It is also true that this satisfaction with the

instructional experience can be linked to the amount of learning, but also to more ephemeral matters such as personality and engagement. Teachers often equate "effective" with positive student evaluations. This equation is not necessarily meaningful or appropriate, but it is pervasive. The logic of "don't fix it if it's not broken" is very much at odds with a view of trying new things and of changing practice on the basis of new research-based knowledge. In other words, competing cultural values are represented by an experienced teaching staff versus a less experienced teaching staff. Example: What might be unheard of or unthinkable practice within a contemporary second language acquisition perspective—books and materials that are more than 25 years old, constant searching of remainder houses for books that are out of print, not using audio and video in language instruction because it is "entertainment" and not "serious" work—can be considered to be highly effective practice within an experiential framework because it has been tested without complaint for 25 years. In other words, if the teaching evaluations are always positive, what justification is there for change?

A question to pose is whether just because an idea is new it must be better. Or whether just because a modern view constructs language teaching in one way, it necessarily means that alternative ways are not effective. The profession needs to a[illegible]owledge that there is no research at the moment that indicates that a teacher trained since the onset of second language acquisition research is in fact a more effective instructor. The evidence available is indirect at best. In a technology-oriented, Western, industrialized view it is argued that effective teaching is characterized by the utilization of new knowledge based on research rather than just "folk wisdom." This view also espouses a belief that "natural" is better than inauthentic and that immediate access to other cultures (i.e., through video, Internet, or films) is better than no access. To be honest, however, there is much more cultural belief at play here than the evidence might suggest. Professional views have perhaps metamorphized into truths.

"But I've been here for 25 years..." Teachers often view longevity as a significant predictor of success and effectiveness. The sense of threat imposed by the less experienced, yet potentially more highly educated and more pointedly educated teacher (at least in the second language acquisition literature) is genuine. The thought that younger teaching staff could be considered for and encouraged to take leadership positions is in conflict with old hierarchies. Younger teaching staff tend to accept "not knowing" as perfectly normal and seek assistance from professional development opportunities. Older teaching staff may see such opportunities as admissions of incompetence. The

potential to look down upon younger teaching staff for admitting that they need additional training and to pressure them not to participate is real. At some level, a dispassionate glance says to move forward without regard to the older teaching staff. Yet it is difficult to balance the self-esteem of the older teaching staff and revere their experience while allowing new ideas to take hold and foster leadership.

"But I only have 5 years to retirement . . ." Language teaching is exhausting. The five-day-a-week language class full of energetic 18-year-olds is draining beyond belief. In an incredibly hectic world, there needs to be some sympathy for those who say they're tired and that they can't do much more. Dealing with teaching staff who take pride in their careers and yet who have little energy or engagement for change and innovation in their practice is challenging. *Who can blame those who want to slow down?* But a further question is: *How we can insure that their desire to slow down does not interfere with the progress of the teaching staff development program?* There are indeed issues of equity. An older teaching staff may make more money; these teachers probably should, but their productivity level might be perceived as considerably less compared to the newer teaching staff when measured by today's standards. For example, it is currently not unusual for newer teaching staff to post their language course syllabi on the Internet and to have each syllabus linked to an array of different websites. Further, course websites often have exercises, video clips, current news from the target culture, and so forth all set up conveniently for student use. Considerable work goes into website development and one cannot fail to appreciate this talent, energy, and vision, especially when they are juxtaposed with a five year old paper syllabus consisting only of the page numbers of textbook lessons and test dates.

And what about the part of the teaching staff who accept Kyle's and Sedotti's assertion? New hires and younger teaching staff members, those who enter with formal knowledge of applied linguistics, also present challenges: how to offer enough development activities that feed their sense of scholarship and their professional ethic of attending workshops and discussing the knowledge they gain there. These younger teachers might lament that they have to hide their professional interests and that they wish they had more opportunities for professional exchange. Most disturbingly, they might ignore and look down upon the older teaching staff. Furthermore, sometimes the less experienced teachers do not value, as much as their more experienced colleagues do, the importance of establishing rapport with their students. The confidence that comes with research-based knowledge can, for some, dispel the notion that language learning is about connections among people.

And what about the pre-SLA teachers who really do try to modernize their practice? A pre-SLA trained teaching staff may indeed not understand what is meant by professional development and may be honestly afraid to admit that. Getting past the lack of understanding may only be a minor hurdle. Once past it, many more experienced teachers, too, can be actively involved in setting goals for themselves, in finding conferences to attend, and books that they need to read. But what to do when the effort itself is still well outside the boundaries of contemporary thinking? Example: A more experienced instructor announces that she is indeed going to pursue the use of technology in her classes. When asked what she is going to do she says: "I'm going to put my grammar lessons on transparencies rather than writing the rules on the board. I've never used an overhead projector." As stunning as this is, it demonstrates an incredible level of courage and yet an even more incredible naivete. And what to do when there is no effort but only resignation? Example: A more experienced instructor announces: "We just don't cut it anymore, do we?" Resignation and dejection are truly major and hidden costs of many reforms and innovations in language teaching.

Dilemmas and Ideas

This author makes no claim that solutions to the dilemmas have been presented here; in fact, it is for this reason that the word *ameliorate* rather than the word *avert* has been used earlier. Nor is this paper a call for "out with the old and in with the new." It is a call for realism: realism about the diversity of professionals in our ranks; realism about the complexities introduced by research in language learning, in teacher education, and about classrooms; realism about the challenges presented by classrooms; and realism about what we concretely know about language teaching versus what we want to believe.

Designing professional development opportunities for teachers is always tricky business. Teachers need to be involved in the development of those opportunities, but what if the teaching staff sit at opposite ends of a continuum on issues ranging anywhere from topics to be addressed to format? One answer is to design professional development for the more experienced teaching staff and separate development activities for the less experienced, post-SLA teaching staff. Such design carries with it, however, the **cost** of potentially driving the two elements even further apart and of perpetuating the same 1970s knowledge base. What may happen if the development activities are designed by one group and the other group joins in? There is a possibility that one group may be threatened by the information and, therefore, may

undermine the actual professional development activity. A compromise of material and format, along with an effort to maintain self-esteem and mutual respect, is a difficult if nearly impossible balance to achieve. One notion is to make sure that the groups have interacted and learned to rely on each other about something *other than language teaching*. It is not unusual in corporate settings to have staff involved in problem-solving activities apart from their actual jobs: taking CPR training together or contributing to and participating in charity challenges, for example. These kinds of events establish trust and build groups and may be crucial preliminaries, far more crucial than anything to do directly with language teaching.

Is the profession at large helpful in recognizing and healing the potential divisions within teaching staff? People sensitive to the social and cognitive complexities of teaching staff—namely, generic teacher educators, for lack of a better term—frequently do not have expertise in foreign language education. So if the goal of professional education is to provide up-to-the-minute thinking, the natural tendency is to ask people who publish their up-to-the-minute thinking to conduct professional development opportunities. But if those opportunities are full of technical SLA-speak, they are of little value. Example: To take as an issue **assessment** and to begin with a concept of test statistics is to start down the wrong road—the wrong road cognitively because some teaching staff may not have the appropriate background to begin there and the wrong road socially because it signals an insensitivity to teachers' daily lives in classrooms. Many SLA professionals are uninterested in notions of teacher development. Herein lies the possibility of having highly respected researchers in the field do more harm than good. The experience of those in the trenches needs to be acknowledged and respected. Sometimes the technical information is revered and constructed as if it holds more importance than teacher knowledge and the context in which teachers work.

The critical point is that all teachers are interested in their students—they all exhibit a high degree of care and concern for student learning. Anything that helps teachers perceive that "things will be better for students" is a selling feature. The post-SLA teaching staff come automatically equipped with concepts of student learning and performance and so any abstraction can be placed against that backdrop—hence, starting with the test statistics might work for this group. The pre-SLA teaching staff have a fully developed sense of activity, of carrying instruction forward through structured actions. Beginning with a sense of feedback and its quality may well be the more productive stance for such professionals. Frankly, only outsiders with an appreciation of the complexities and sensitivities involved in

teaching staff development can provide useful development opportunities. Outsiders without those sensitivities are not helpful. Furthermore, insiders are frequently stuck, being unable to be "prophets in their own lands."

Diversity among the teaching staff can be the source of dilemmas that catch researchers' attention. Perhaps an examination of organizational theory will help the field to understand how to cope sensitively and reasonably with the issues presented here. Perhaps the time has also come for a realistic re-assessment of the importance and impact of second language learning research. Has the field so emulated the literary research field that decries classroom experience and elevates theory that it has lost sight of what is truly important for learners and teachers? It is, of course, possible that the phenomena described here are just predictable instances of generational conflict and change. Perhaps this is simply what happens when individuals are put out to pasture or feel they are being put out to pasture; perhaps it is true that youthful zeal always leads in the direction of decrying a previous generation. At some level, these are questions for the field. Perhaps at the more fundamental level, though, they are personal questions for all teachers and language program directors to consider.

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